

William R. Rodman House  
388 County Street  
(southeast corner County and Cherry Streets)  
New Bedford  
Bristol County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-676

HABS  
MASS,  
3-NEBED,  
10-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

## WILLIAM R. RODMAN HOUSE

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Address: 388 County Street (southeast corner County and Cherry Streets), New Bedford, Bristol County, Massachusetts

Present Owner and Occupant: Jewish Community Center, 388 County Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts

Present Use: Social and Religious Center

Brief Statement of Significance: A fine granite mansion of the 1830's, long inhabited by some of the leading families of New Bedford, typifying the gracious life and prosperity based on the whaling and shipping industries. Attributed to the architect Russell Warren.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built for William R. Rodman in 1833, sold to Abraham H. Howland in 1865 for \$25,000. Later (c. 1907) owned by the heirs of Frederick Grinnell and Horatio Hathaway, and in the 1920's by Walter H. Langshaw. Presently owned by the Jewish Community Center of New Bedford. Worth, Palmer and Austin, "Old Dartmouth," p. 271. Z. W. Pease, The Centenary of the Merchants National Bank (New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1925), p. 27.
2. Date of erection: 1833 ibid.
3. Architect: Designs said to have been furnished by Russell Warren, of Providence, Rhode Island ibid.
4. Original plan: U-shaped, with court at rear Atlas of New Bedford City, Massachusetts, 1881, plate 7. Central hall plan.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Additions made to rear, apparently early 20th century, and alterations to stairway and hall at the same time. Some installation of counter in entry, folding doors and platform in south parlors, in the 1950's when the building was converted into a social center; apparently at that time a secondary stairway and fire escape were added, on the north side. based on personal observation of the building.

6. Important old views: Photograph of the front, without wooden enframings of entrance door, by Fred W. Palmer around or before 1907.
7. Sources of information: Small plan of estate, in 1881 Atlas of New Bedford, apparently before any additions were made to rear. Atlas of New Bedford City, Massachusetts (Boston: George H. Walker and Company, 1881), plate 7. Worth, Palmer and Austin, "Old Dartmouth," a manuscript in the Old Dartmouth Historical Society, Johnny Cake Hill, New Bedford, Massachusetts. This consists of photographs of houses and public buildings in New Bedford, Fairhaven, Acushnet, Dartmouth, and Westport; photographs by Fred W. Palmer, introduction and notes by Henry B. Worth, "done into shape" by Emma C. Austin; dated September 1907.
- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: This house was owned and occupied for a time by Abraham H. Howland, the first mayor of New Bedford.
- C. Likely sources not yet Investigated: Unclassified papers in the Old Dartmouth Historical Society may possibly contain information relating to this building; Registry of Deeds.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A substantial and spacious granite mansion with an imposing Greek Corinthian portico, which retains a number of elaborate Greek Revival details on the interior in spite of alterations.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 62' wide, 55' deep, plus portico 12' deep; rear wing 31' long. House faces west. Three stories.
2. Foundations: Granite ashlar (see walls, below).
3. Wall construction: Ashlar of local granite, courses 15 1/2' high, 1/4' joints; some pieces up to 10' long. Dressed smooth on front, rough faced on other sides. Wall of third story wood frame.
4. Porches, stoops, bullheads, etc: Two-story wooden Greek Corinthian portico extends across whole front; six columns.

24 flutes, with a vertical joint in center of each arris. Round base is jointed as follows: (1) a little above bottom of fluting, (2) top of upper torus, (3) top of scotia, (4) top of lower torus, (5) bottom of lower torus. This wooden base rests on a square granite block whose surface is flush with porch floor level. Porch floor of stone, with granite steps leading down to ground level, extending across front.

Small terrace on south side, with modern tile floor, and wooden balustrade. A long flight of granite steps leads down to lawn, with a fine wrought iron railing at each side--these appear old but in my opinion may have been taken from some other building and added to this one.

5. Chimneys: Four brick chimneys, two on north and two on south side, show above house cornice.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance on center is enframed by a pair of wooden Greek Corinthian columns with entablature over--these are a relatively modern addition, but are in the style of the large portico. The door itself appears quite modern. A photograph of the house c. 1907 indicates that the doorway at that time had smaller columns set into the masonry opening, one just inside each jamb; other details are indistinguishable on the photograph.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Simple masonry openings, with jambs of a single block each, lintel and sill--all of granite. Windows on front wall only have horizontal stone joints carrying through jambs. Double hung wood sash. No shutters.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Very low pitch--cannot be seen from ground.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: Complete entablature of Corinthian Order, in wood, carries around main body of house as cornice, at top of second story. Small wooden cornice carries around third floor.
8. Other exterior details: There is a smooth granite ante at each corner of the main block of the house, with a wooden capital; these fit into the ordonnance of the front portico and house cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interiors

1. Floor plans: First: Central entrance vestibule and hall terminating in a widened stair hall at rear. Two offices on the north at the front, one parlor in middle, secondary stair hall at rear. One large parlor (assembly room) at south, opening to a conservatory and terrace; at the rear is a large room added to the original house. A kitchen extends behind the main stair hall. Original main body of house appears to have comprised a central hall and two parlors at each side. Second: Rooms reached from an H-shaped system of halls. Third: Full length of main part of house, but narrower.
2. Stairways: Main stairway appears to follow form of original one but may have been rebuilt; the grandiose sediculae on the end wall appear to date from early 20th century. A main central flight, landing, a few steps to each side, and a return flight at each side. Open stair, with wood handrail and balusters. Good condition. Round skylight over stair hall.  
  
Secondary stairway adjoining on north is modern; for service.
3. Flooring: All appear modern addition. Marble mosaic in main hall on first floor, others of hardwood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, painted. Good condition.
5. Doorways and doors: First floor doors in front portion have been replaced. Others at the rear, and on second floor, appear to be original for the most part; they are typically of mahogany, with one moulded panel. These doorways have wide wood trim, with corner blocks. Good condition.
6. Trim: (All in good condition)

South parlors of first floor: A cornice, frieze with anthemion ornament, and architrave, extend around room; all painted in monochrome. In center of each ceiling, an elongated octagonal panel, with eight acanthus leaves radiating from center. These features appear to be of plaster. Decoration in low relief.

Doorways are framed with antae, and full entablature with triglyphs; anthemion decoration in low relief between head of door and bottom of architrave.

Windows framed with antae and full simple entablature. Reveal of opening carries down to floor, with paneled wainscot below window stool. Folding shutters.

High baseboard; wood chair rail decorated with fret.

Fireplace on outer wall of each parlor, dark veined marble mantels and hearths.

In my opinion, the trim described above is original, and the wall panels of plaster, between chair rail and room cornice, are later additions, probably early 20th century.

North parlor of first floor: Wide opening to hall, with square antae. Plaster ceiling with shallow coffers. Fireplace with dark veined marble mantel and hearth. These appear original, other decorations of this room later additions.

Southeast parlor: This room appears to have been enlarged in the early 20th century, and almost completely refinished in a style somewhat resembling Louis XIV or a German derivative of it. A white marble mantel on north wall, with two Ionic columns and entablature which is bowed out, appears original.

7. Hardware: Original doors each hung with three heavy silver-plated brass butts. Silver-plated knobs and keyhole covers. Mortice locks.
8. Lighting: Modern electric; no evidence of original fixtures.
9. Heating: Modern central heating. Original fireplaces described above (under "Trim").

#### D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Near edge of plateau, overlooking old part of town and harbor to the east. House faces a street on the west, with side street on north. Neighborhood of spacious lawns. Lot about 250' frontage and 400' depth, nearly rectangular, as shown on a city atlas of 1881; present lot appears to be the same.
2. Enclosures: A granite wall about waist-high along streets, probably original.
3. Outbuildings: 1881 atlas indicates a masonry building and a wood building, near the northeast corner of the

lot. These do not appear now.

4. Walks, driveways, etc.: A curving driveway from street to west front of house, with entrance gates at each front corner. This appears original, but paving is modern. Granite posts line inner side of driveway; hooks on them indicate that chains formerly hung between them.
5. Landscaping: Fine plantings, especially near street front; there is no indication whether these resemble original landscaping, however.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect  
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